10 Tips for Supporting Culturally Diverse Clients

Cultural diversity is an important factor influencing senior care.

Providing culturally sensitive care is essential to supporting the elderly from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Defining Cultural and Linguistic Competence

Culture refers to the history, language, traditions, beliefs, and ideas shared by a group of people. Culture determines how people see the world and their place in it.

Cultural and Linguistic Competence is the ability of Healthcare organizations and health care providers to understand and respond effectively to the cross-cultural and linguistic needs of clients.

Cultural competence is a critical requirement that is achieved through awareness and education of staff and regulatory policies related to cultural diversity.

The Role of Activity Staff in Providing Multicultural Care

A significant number of clients these days are from diverse cultural backgrounds. A ‘one size fits all’ approach is not effective.

Activity Staff play an integral role in supporting the elderly from different cultures and ensuring they are not socially isolated.

To deliver culturally appropriate care, the focus should be on maintaining and affirming cultural identity and knowledge.

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Cultural Support in Care Plans
Develop Care plans that are compatible with your client’s community affiliations. The ‘Social Profile’ is perhaps the most important tool you can use to assess clients. This document should be compiled in collaboration with the client, their relatives, activity staff and other allied healthcare providers.

Related:
Compassionate Communication
Understand that beliefs and traditions are powerful forces in a person's life.

Client behavior can be based on misguided perceptions e.g. in some cultures nodding the head means acknowledging but not accepting what is being said.

Do not make assumptions even if the client can speak English. Try to keep communication as simple as possible to avoid confusion and misinterpretation.

Consider learning some key words in different languages to better communicate with clients.

Related:
- Tips for Communicating with English-Second-Language Clients
- Communication Cards for Seniors

Cultural Leisure Activities
Include cultural leisure pastimes in your Activity Program. Introduce games, books and magazines relevant to each culture.

Foster relationships with community organizations relevant to the cultures at your facility; clubs, neighbourhood groups, folkloric musicians, dance groups, and religious affiliations.

Related: Multicultural Activities

Show Empathy & Interest
Demonstrate an openness to exploring issues from the point of view of your client’s culture. Remember that there are many similarities as well as differences across cultures. Build on the similarities to help each other.

Eliminate Prejudice
Be aware that prejudice is prevalent in most societies. It is essential to eliminate biases and discrimination and cultivate tolerance and compassion.
Engage Volunteers
Find bi-lingual volunteers to help support clients from multicultural backgrounds. They will appreciate the opportunity to enjoy the company of someone who speaks their language and understands their culture.

Related: How to Establish a Volunteer Program

Collaborate with Relatives
Ask relatives for advice and involve them in decision-making.

Celebrate Multicultural Days
Include traditional holidays, name days and regional festivals in your monthly Activity Program. Introduce a yearly Multicultural Food Festival and request samples of regional food from relatives.

Related: Multicultural Market Day

Support Religious & Spiritual Beliefs
Accept that religion, spirituality and beliefs may influence how clients behave.

Related: 10 Spiritual Activities for People with Alzheimer's Disease

Provide Linguistic Support
Provide translation services, radio podcasts and videos relevant to the cultural background of your clients.

We'd love to hear your feedback!
What strategies do you use to support culturally diverse clients?